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# THE QUEEN'S GARDEN

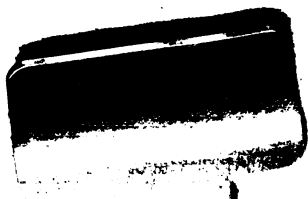
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# The Queen's Garden



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By M. E. M. DAVIS

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*The gate is locked and the key is lost,  
I'm in this Lady's Garden*

OLD SONG



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BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

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1900

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To  
MARY PEARL DAVIS

M578524



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# The QUEEN'S GARDEN

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## The Letter

**N**OEL LEPEYRE sat looking out of the car window. The train rolled almost noiselessly over its smooth road-bed. There were sugar plantations on either side, where the cane waved and glistened under the yellow rays of the setting sun ; and occasional groves of orange-trees, whose stiff, round-bunched green threw into bright relief the silvery shining banana-clumps beyond. Long stretches of half-cleared swamp-land, where bearded moss hung motionless from the bare limbs of girdled trees, alternated with fields of artichoke, dust-gray in the hot September haze. Now and then quaint old towns flashed



by, with red roofs, and church spires needle-like against the sky. The landscape, poetic, semi-tropical, unfamiliar, harmonized, to Noel's dreaming fancy, with the foreign speech of a group of girls over against her. They had entered the car at the last station, and they were chattering like young sparrows. She did not understand the musical tongue, but something within her — her father's blood — responded to its soft accents, its caressing tones and slurring syllables. "Ah, they are Creoles, those girls; I am sure of it!" she murmured in a pleased undertone, listening, with her eyes fixed on the flying cane-fields.

Apparently there was nothing foreign about herself except her name. Her fluttering neighbors were dark-haired, velvet-eyed, plump, bewitching. Noel was tall and slim — much too meagre, indeed, for beauty.

Her limpid eyes were blue-gray; her

mouth drooped a little at the corners like that of a child who has been crying vainly for its mother. Her hair, coiled in wavy abundance on the nape of her white neck, was ashen-blonde, — “sun-lighted,” the old gentleman on the seat behind her, who had traveled in the same coach with her for two days, had at length decided. He marveled greatly, Major John Steele, being very old-fashioned, that so young a girl, so very beautiful, reminding him so strangely of a girl whom he had loved — and lost — in his early youth, should be allowed to journey so far without a companion.

Noel Lepeyre was traveling alone. But that was nothing! She was used to being alone. Only — her heart began to beat, and the blood mounted to her pale cheeks as her thoughts reverted once more to that unknown relative — French creole, like her father — to whom the too rapid railway train was convey-

ing her. Perhaps aunt Margaret — “Tante Marguerite” she had called herself in the letter — would speak no English !

Another aunt ! Noel heaved a doleful sigh. For this strange, formidable, foreign aunt was no less than the fourth who had entered, armed with authority, into her life. Already there had been three, — all poor, but at least they could speak English ! commented Noel miserably. Three, of varying degrees of consanguinity, since Claude Lepeyre and his wife had died, one following the other within a month to the hillside cemetery in west Texas, leaving the little maid of seven dependent upon the family charity. Noel began to reckon them up and tell them off as usual on her fingers : first, aunt Hester, mamma's sister, with her pale face and weary voice ; her slouching husband and her herd of noisy children, — no

wonder she died, poor aunt Hester. Then, mamma's great-aunt, who was nothing short of terrible. Aunt Harlowe, who reckoned crinkly hair — one of Claude Lepeyre's many sins visited upon his daughter — a shame and a disgrace. Noel put up a white, ungloved hand, and patted down the flying curls about her ears in retrospective awe of great-aunt Harlowe. Number Two, on a belated deathbed, confided the penniless orphan to step-aunt Mitchell. Tears rose to Noel's eyes, and her slender throat swelled. She had loved step-aunt Mitchell despite her scolding tongue — oh, in spite of many things besides the little-to-eat and the less-to-wear of her seven years' drudgery with Number Three! The mourning she wore for this latest guardian was rusty. But this came of having to wear the one gown, day in and day out, in the little country school where she had been

teaching since that rainy day in the cemetery six months ago. Noel's tears flowed unchecked down her softly-wan cheeks, and fell in a bright shower on the rusty black gown.

Major John Steele leaned forward and opened his lips to speak. But he drew back, for the girl had taken a letter from her traveling-bag, and was smoothing out its thin crinkly folds on her knee.

Another aunt. This time at least a real one. Papa's own sister — dear, brave, beautiful papa! Nevertheless she shivered; the phraseology of the letter was so remote, so strange, so unreal.

I await thy coming with rapture, my child. Where have they hidden thee through all these years, that I have not even known of thy existence! I learn of it but this instant from thy letter. I have been a lonely woman nearly the whole of my life, having left to me

neither father, nor mother, husband, nor son; nor hélas, my only brother! Claude, thy father, was used to call me La Reine Margot, in the old days before we quarreled and he went away. Hélas, we had quarreled, my brother Claude and I. (I will tell thee about that foolish quarrel, mon enfant.) And I never heard from him again, nor knew whither he had gone! So, he married, my brother Claude — an Américane, n'est ce pas? And he is dead! And Margot has been these many years a discrowned queen! But enough. Come to me without delay, my child. I send money for the journey of thyself and thy maid. (Noel laughed for the hundredth time at the mere notion of Noel Lepeyre attended by a maid.) Stay not for any preparation. I am having thy garments made here. Come, Noel, Claude's daughter. I am become old. I am impatient. Marcelle will meet

thee on the further side of the river,  
and conduct thee to me. Viens, chérie,  
viens, sans delai, à ta

TANTE MARGUERITE.



## II

---

### Across the River

NOEL folded up the letter and returned it to the bag. She was almost, nay, quite sorry that she had adventured the note of inquiry which had brought this immediate response. But she had been so forlorn the day her school closed! And step-aunt Mitchell's cousin, Louisa Marsh, had come, in a lopsided buggy, to take her to a new home, — another aunt! And, quite by accident, — at the time it seemed by special decree of Providence, — she had found among her father's treasured papers a memorandum in his own handwriting: —

“For Noel, in case of my death.

*The address of my only sister.*

MADAME ANATOLE CHRÉTIEN,

No. — — St.,

*New Orleans.”*



Tante Marguerite's letter was most kind, certainly ; the inclosure had taken her breath away ; a princely sum remained even after the lavish parting gifts to nearly everybody in the neighborhood ! But, oh, the longing to go back ! to the shock-headed school-children ! to the leaky shed-room in the country boarding-house ! even to step-aunt Mitchell's cousin, Louisa Marsh !

A sudden darkness succeeded to the pale gleam of the fast-falling twilight. Noel looked up. The train had come to a standstill under a vast iron shed. Passengers were hastily collecting their bags and bundles. The vivacious group of dark-eyed girls were already rustling along the aisle, calling gayly to friends without as they crowded to the platform.

The young girl traveling alone stood up, her pulses jumping painfully. Major John Steele, carrying his battered

valise, his umbrella, and his gold-headed cane in one hand, picked up her traveling-bag with the other. "Let me assist you," he said courteously. "I am told that we take a ferry-boat here to cross the Mississippi River." He walked on without awaiting a reply; she followed mechanically, a pitiful sort of smile frozen on her quivering lips. "Are you expecting any one? Will your friends meet you?" he continued, when he had helped her from the car.

"Yes, sir." She scanned eagerly the faces of the jostling crowd in the station. "I am expecting Marcelle" — She stopped, blushing in a shamefaced way. It had occurred to her for the first time that she did not know whether Marcelle were old or young, black or white, man or woman! Marcelle sounded, she thought, like a man's name, but — Her companion was already hurrying her down the long flight of steps to the

ferry - boat which awaited its passengers.

The mighty river lay apparently motionless under the darkening sky. Only a bit of driftwood swirling by, here and there, betrayed the treacherous undercurrent at that moment gnawing away the very point upon which the ferry-landing was constructed. The long line of electric lights outlining the great crescent of the opposite shore sparkled like a jeweled chain against a vapory sky, and scintillated brokenly in the dark waters below. A few boats moved softly on the stream ; small craft with noiseless invisible oars, a steamboat or two trailing long plumes of spark-shotten smoke from their tall chimneys ; and one majestic brig, in tow of a puffing tug, making for her berth against the levee. There was a sense of moonlight in the air, though a bank of cloud hid the waxing moon. Noel stood silent at the major's elbow.

"My name," he explained, stooping to her, for he was very tall, and affecting not to observe her agitation, "my name is John Henry Steele, late a major in the Confederate States Army."

"Oh!" cried Noel brightening, "my father was in the army, too. Captain Lepeyre — Captain Claude Lepeyre. I am Noel Lepeyre."

"So?" said the major, pleased. "All the better. You will allow me to take care of you — the daughter of a comrade-in-arms — if Mar — if" —

"Marcelle," prompted Noel. "Marcelle was to meet me on the further side of the river."

"— if Marcelle should not be at the landing. Doubtless he — she — Marcelle — has been delayed."

At that moment the boat uttered a groaning protest, trembled and stood still. Noel's heart, which under its temporary respite had become almost tranquil, began to throb again.

"Is there a — a person here by the name of Marcelle?" demanded Major John Steele in a loud and somewhat stern voice, when they had reached the crowded waiting-room. A few people paused to stare in his direction, but no one responded.

"Is there any one here to meet Miss Lepeyre? Miss Noel Lepeyre?" he asked after a moment's silence, glaring around the rapidly emptying room.

The major damned, under his breath, the criminal negligence of Miss Noel Lepeyre's friends. A girl of nineteen — a girl like that! alone at night in a strange, wicked, devouring city! By Gad, this Marcelle, devil take him, ought to be strung up to the nearest limb! But he turned a reassuring face to Miss Lepeyre herself. "Do not be worried, my child," he said. "You have the address of your aunt? Yes? Then it is a very

simple matter. Let me have your check first, so that I may send up your trunk ; then, I will conduct you to Madame Chrétien."



### III

---

#### A Closed Door

**T**HE swift flight of the electric car through the dim streets, the loud, insistent clang of its bell, its amazing curves and dangerous doublings, disquieted Major Steele almost as much as they did his companion. He sat with closed eyes, a valise on either knee, holding Noel's hand; and he thanked God aloud when the new-fangled coach stopped. The conductor, calling out the name of the street, assisted the old man and his charge to alight.

"A great advance in locomotion doubtless," remarked the major as the car darted away. "But for myself, I prefer a buggy and a pair of mules! I am not familiar with the city of New Orleans," he continued, picking his way across the granite pavement to the sidewalk, with

Noel's hand on his arm. "I have indeed never been here before. This, I take it, from the foreign names I observe on the signs, is the celebrated French Quarter. He looked around with an interest which in truth was wholly feigned. For he was old, the major, and very tired.

"Oh!" exclaimed Noel, appalled by the forbidding strangeness of the narrow side street, whose peaked roofs seemed almost to meet in the strip of sky above. The standing water in the open gutters nauseated her, the unintelligible chatter of the children swarming the pavements confused her wearied senses. "Let us go back! I mean — oh, I mean, you must not come out of your way with me, dear Major Steele. I am giving you so much trouble! I — I can find the place by myself I am s-s-sure."

"Nonsense!" returned the major decidedly. "Do you think I would



allow such a thing ! It is not the least trouble. Besides, I have a granddaughter at home about your age," he added, as if to clinch the matter.

As they advanced along the street the crowd seemed to thicken. At one corner a barrel-organ, ground by a ragged negro lad, was wheezing forth a melancholy tune; a dozen or more children danced gayly to the music ; a few paces further on, a couple of men stationed like sentinels before a closed door which gave directly upon the sidewalk, were good-humoredly returning the jeers and taunts of the gang of gamins, of both sexes and divers colors, surrounding them. A small parti-colored flag fluttered from the lintel of the door, just above their heads. The old Confederate officer stopped a second to peer at this unknown pennon, which perhaps evoked memories of another, unforgetten, rag of bunting ; but at a half whis-

pered explanation from one of the sentinels, he uttered a horrified ejaculation and hurried his companion forward.

The house they sought was but half a square away. The ponderous wooden door was shut. The tall brick building, with its drawn shutters and grilled balconies, had the air of a prison. Major Steele hesitated as he laid a hand upon the huge iron knocker. "I can take you to some friends of my own, Miss Noel," he suggested tentatively, "at least until to-morrow. Would you not prefer this?"

"Oh, no, no," she cried hysterically: "See, here is her name on the door-plate. Madame Anatole Chrétien. Madame Chrétien is my father's sister — my own aunt."

"Yes, yes, I know." The reverberating echo of the knock, thrice repeated, brought the pack of gamins to the spot. They looked on curiously while Ma-

jor Steele listened and knocked, and knocked and listened again. Noel stared with fascinated eyes at the grotesque face which grinned at her from the knocker.

"This is Sunday, you know, my child," the major remarked at length, desisting and turning to her. "Doubtless the servants are all out." But, as he spoke, the sound of a falling bar was heard within, a bolt shot aside, the small wicket, set like a trap-door in one of the green batten valves of the portal, was opened cautiously, and a woman's voice demanded querulously,

"Qu'est-ce que c'est, que ça? Qui est là?"

"Comment ça va, Madame la Grogneuse! Ah, ah, Marcelle! vieille sorcière! Va-t-en! Va-t-en! yelled the gamins, dancing in a body to the threshold of the door, and rushing back into the street.

"Oh," breathed Noel, with a sigh of relief, hearing the now familiar name. "It is Marcelle" —

"Marcelle, judging by the voice, is a woman," interjected the major, not fully satisfied.

"It is I, Marcelle! Noel, Noel Lepeyre; Madame Chrétien's niece."

"Grand Dieu! Je l'avais oubliée!" Marcelle thrust her face through the opening; a wrinkled yellow face, framed in a lofty tignon, with deep-set yellow-brown eyes and overhanging brows. Major Steele's anxious brow cleared; the respectable old family servant was unmistakable. Noel was already shaking his hand gayly. "Good-by, Major Steele; good-by, dear Major Steele. You have been so good to me. I shall never forget you, never!"

The major looked at her a little wistfully over his shoulder, as he trudged away, limping, bent, and travel-worn.

Her light figure was poised, butterfly-like, on the threshold of the wide door. She was gazing with eager eyes before her, and into her own new life. "Even now she has forgotten me!" he sighed. "Heigho! it is the way of youth."

He entered an electric car, too weary to be apprehensive of its rocket-like vagaries, and sank into a corner.

Marcelle had drawn back her head. She seemed about to shut the wicket in the intruder's face. But Noel forestalled her by stepping over the high sill into the corridor.



## IV

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### Within

**T**HE old mulattress closed the door and put the huge iron bar in its place. Meantime, Noel's eyes sought to pierce the gloom about her. The tunnel-like corridor was wide and high ; a small stream of water ran in a shallow groove along the middle of the stone pavement, glinting like a silver thread at the farther end where the corridor opened into a garden-close filled with pale moonlight. A far-away musical sound as of falling spray echoed along the raftered ceiling and mingled with the confused noises of the street outside. Noel, following her mute conductress, caught, as she drew near the court, a glimmer of star-like blossoms among the sombre masses of foliage there ; and inhaled the subtle

scent of night-blooming jessamine, which pervaded the warm air.

At the foot of the wide sweep of stair which led into the arched hall, Marcelle paused. "I h'ask the pardon of mam-selle," she said, speaking for the first time in intelligible though quaint and stiff English; "I have forgot to go to that r-rell-r-road, me. I am desolated. Mon Dieu! how madame will be en-rage'! You have voyaged alone in that r-rell-r-road, Mamselle Noel? Ees eet that you have no femme de chambre?"

"Yes," said Noel, smiling, "I came alone!"

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Quelle imprudence! An' me, I have forgot that r-rell-r-road!"

"Oh, it did not matter at all, your not meeting me," interrupted Noel kindly. "I had no trouble getting here; there was the nicest old gentleman — I will explain to my aunt" —

A curious spasm passed over Marcelle's face. She stepped hastily back; for a second it seemed to Noel that the old servitor, conscience-stricken perhaps, and dreading the wrath of her mistress, was meditating flight. But after a helpless glance around, she brushed past the young girl and led the way up the stair. In the lighted vestibule she paused again. "You are hongree, Mamselle Noel? You will come in the salle-à-manger?"

"Is my aunt—is Madame Chrétien there?" Noel frowned slightly as she put the question. A half-formed fear of her guide began to assail her.

"No, Mamselle Noel, Madame Chrétien ees een hair baid" —

"Her" —

"Hair baid, mamselle. Since to-day she ees a leetle seeck."

"Oh!" Noel's voice was full of dismay. "My aunt is sick? She is in



bed? Then take me to her. At once, Marcelle."

"*Pardon*, mamselle. Madame has not yet hear' that you have arrive'. I will tell hair. She will be emotioned. But she has order me al-r-ready to say that she will res-ceive mamselle, hair niece, to-morrow."

Marcelle's voice was respectful, but firm.

Noel's vague fear increased. What if this meagre, weazened, yellow old creature were one of those wicked enchantresses of whom she had read? One of those voodoo witches who tole young girls to destruction. She dared not follow her impulse to cry out, but she moved slowly, with her eyes fixed warily upon the spare figure before her, ready to turn and flee at the slightest doubtful word or gesture. Marcelle threw open the door of a large brilliantly lighted room, and stood aside, motioning the

guest, or interloper? to enter. On the threshold, where she halted trembling, Noel's fears instantly vanished. The first object which met her roving glance was a portrait of her own father. It hung, wreathed with fresh flowers, above the carved mantel; the lighted candelabra below were veiled with softly tinted shades. The dark, delicate face smiled down at her in tender greeting, as from a rosy aureole.

"Oh, Marcelle!" breathed the girl, with a quick gush of happy tears.

The small table, daintily laid for two, was also adorned with roses. "Madame has h'arrange' those rose hairsself," explained Marcelle, her manner beginning to lose something of its studied formality. "Also, madame has had the intention to dine with mamselle; but thees indisposition, — oh, jus' a bagatelle of a migraine, oh, but no'sing to tr-rouble mamselle" —

"I am so sorry," cried Noel. "I wish I might see her. For one moment, Marcelle?"

"Non! Non! Madame hairsself has forbeed mamselle to h'approach hair baid," the mulattress returned hastily. "You will h'excuse me, Mamselle Noel," she added with more composure, "eef I go to breeng yo' dinner? The domesteeek have all depart, since to-day — cochons, imbeciles, têtes de choux!" She relapsed suddenly into her native tongue, shaking her turbaned head wrathfully; the great hoops of gold in her ears beating her cheeks.

"Do not trouble about me at all, Marcelle," besought Noel, sitting down to her soup. "I am sure my aunt must need you. And I am used to waiting on myself."

"Merci, mamselle." Marcelle's severe face had relaxed, though her eyes were sombre and unsmiling. Neverthe-

less, she remained to serve the appetizing meal with an elaborate ceremony quite startling to Noel's country-bred eyes. Then, with a murmured "*Pardon*," she went away.

Noel heard, or thought she heard, the sound of voices somewhere in the house; one raised in surprised expostulation, the other humbly explanatory. But these soon died away into silence. She pushed her chair back from the flower-laden table and looked with undisguised curiosity about the room. She had eaten with the healthy appetite of the young; not too much disturbed, to say truth, by the slight indisposition of that mysterious unseen Number Four!

Ah, here was the portrait of Number Four hanging on the opposite wall, — Marguerite Chrétien, by the lettered legend on the frame. But, how beautiful! A slender dark-eyed girl, in a stiff

white satin gown with low corsage and full sleeves, heavy with pearl embroidery. A rope of milk-white pearls melted into her white neck ; she had a red rose in her dusky hair. How strange that papa had never spoken to her, Noel, of this beautiful Marguerite Chrétien, his only sister !

But stay ! Little by little there began to dawn on Noel's memory fragments of the stories he used to tell her — the wide-eyed child on his knee. One story in particular, known to father and daughter as the Fairy Story, had in it an old enchanted palace, with vine-hung balconies and winding stairs ; and a moonlit garden-close, where all manner of strange and lovely trees, and shrubs, and flowers grew. *And there was a Young Queen who glided about the stately Palace and along the garden walks,— beautiful, wayward, and fateful,— La Reine Margot.*

“ Claude, thy father, was used to call me La Reine Margot,” quoted Noel from Madame Chrétien’s letter, breathless with this discovery. “ Did you know my father, Marcelle ? ” she demanded of the mulattress who had entered noiselessly.

“ Eef I know M’sieu Claude ! But yes, mamselle, from an eenfant. M’sieu Claude has been born in thees ’ouse. He was a joli garçon, M’sieu Claude. But me, I have been the bonne of Mamselle Marguerite. At the cradle ; at the schoolroom ; at the marriage ; at the death of m’sieu, hair husband, at the tomb of hair h’only son — oh, but these feefty year, I have been at the side of madame ! ”

The brown shapely hand holding the silver candlestick trembled so that the flame of the lighted candle wavered to and fro.

“ Is — is she worse ? Is my aunt

very ill?" Noel, disturbed by an undertone in Marcelle's voice, drew nearer and clasped her arm.

"Mais, non, non! Eet ees no'sing, mon Dieu, no'sing at all." She shook off the light clasp almost angrily. "Will you come to yo' chambre à coucher, Mamselle Noel?"

She moved rapidly away across the great arched hall and up the broad stair. Noel ran lightly after her.

The bedchamber on the upper floor was a large one. Noel, left alone in it, looked rather sleepily about her. She was surprised to see her shabby little trunk, unstrapped, in a corner; and her traveling-bag open on a chair. Her simple toilet articles had been unpacked and arranged on the dressing-table. A dainty night-robe, smelling of dried rose-leaves, lay across the foot of the bed; a pair of tiny bedroom slippers were placed on the floor below. Noel, comb-

ing out her long hair, experienced a luxurious sensation quite new to her. "As if I really possessed that mythical maid—that *femme de chambre*." She laughed, imitating, and not unsuccessfully, Marcelle's long-drawn accent. She fell half asleep on her knees in an attempt to say her prayers, roused herself to wonder over the carved steps leading up to the stately four-posted, canopied bed, lifted the lace netting, sprang into the white lavendered nest, reached out a hand to extinguish the light on the little table *de nuit*, and fell instantly into dreamless slumber.





## V

---

### Apparitions

**N**OEL awoke with a start ; her heart was throbbing unaccountably. She sat up in bed and peered with sleep-distraught eyes through the mosquito-bar. Its misty folds confused her ; the little statuette of the Virgin above the bénitier on the wall, seen through them, reminded her vaguely of the heaven of her childish dreams, with its clouds and its harping angels. A tender dawnlight filled the room, and for one moment the silence was profound. Then there came again the sound which had pierced her slumber — a smothered wail, half pain, half anger, like the cry of a wounded animal. Noel, accustomed to lend a hand in all family emergencies, threw up the netting and leaped to the floor. She opened the door and ran

along the outer hall, flashing like a white spirit through its gloom ; and descended the stair to the broad landing. There she paused, grasping the balustrade with one hand, and leaned over, gazing down into the vestibule below. The sight which met her eyes fairly froze the blood in her veins. Marcelle was crouched in a kneeling posture against the wall ; her long skinny arms, bare to the shoulder, were raised above her head ; her face under the dim light of the hall lamp was drawn and distorted. She rocked herself from side to side in a paroxysm of grief, or anger, uttering from time to time those cries which had aroused the sleeping girl.

But the three figures standing near her, menacing her with signs and harsh whispers ! what were they ? To Noel's frightened imagination they had the appearance of spectres, or ghouls ! in their long yellowish white robes ; and

their strange head-coverings, which were drawn across the lower part of their faces, leaving visible only their angry and threatening eyes; visions of the Holy Inquisition and its terrible emissaries darted through her brain. A sinister silence followed the hoarse whisperings.

Noel stared down with distended eyes, her lips parted, her hand pressed against her bosom. Suddenly, the mulattress, glancing up, saw her; she sprang to her feet and called out, gesticulating with frantic arms. Noel understood neither the words nor the gesture. She continued to stand, paralyzed by terror, on the landing, her slender form in its snowy night-gear trembling from head to foot. But a figure detached itself from the shadows of a recess where the pale dawn struggled with the yellow rays of the hanging lamp—the figure of a man. Noel saw his face imperfectly; she remembered it afterward—the thin, dark,

benignant face with its white beard and gray hair. But at sight of him, a human being like herself, the blood flowed once more to her face, her feet were loosened, and without even hearing his stern order, "Back! Go back to your room. At once!" she fled precipitately to her chamber, where she fell half fainting upon her bed.

A long time after — she had hardly dared to breathe, but cowered shivering under the bedclothes — there was a knock at her door, peremptorily repeated; it was accompanied by a low voice which she recognized as Marcelle's. "It is I, Mamselle Noel. Come." Noel's relief was not unmixed with apprehension. But she arose resolutely and unbolted and threw open the door. There was no one in sight. As she drew back, Marcelle spoke again; she was standing some half a dozen paces away, in the embrasure of a hall window. Her face

still showed signs of agitation, but her voice was quite steady.

“Listen, Mamselle Noel, eef you please,” she began without further preliminary. “Madame Chrétien has that fiev’—la fievre jaune. She was souffrante yesterday, pauvre enfant; an’ she has been afraid eet was that yellow fiev’. Eet ees for thees that she has forbeed hairself to see mamselle last night. Ah, but Mamselle Noel, how madame has desire to hold you in hair arm! How she has thought but of you seense that letter has arrive’! The flower and the fraicheur everywhere, they are of hair hand. How she is gentille, ce pauvre ange!”

Marcelle’s hard voice melted with indescribable softness. “Eh bien, Mamselle Noel, she has that yellow fiev’. Those doctor have arrive’. They have h’examine. They have con-sult’. They have pronounce’. They are imbeciles,

in those linen duster which make h'everybody afraid. Me, I did not desire those doctor. Have I not nurse that yellow fiev'? Ees eet that I do not know the tisanes for that fiev'? But no. They have pronounce'. They have nail a flag on the door; they have place' some guard there, so that nobody may enter in that door, or go out in that street. They have sen' a tr-r-enn-nurse. Yes. As eef Marcelle ees not acquaint' with that yellow fiev'! As eef m'sieu, the husband of Madame Chrétien, has not die of that fiev' in these arm! Hein!"

She stretched out her arms, uttering an indignant snarl. But instantly returning to her calmer tone, she proceeded rapidly to indicate the course of conduct prescribed for her young kinswoman by Madame Chrétien herself, on reading in the faces of the physicians the confirmation of her own fears.

Mademoiselle Lepeyre, being, un-

fortunately, already in the house, could not leave it until all danger of infection was past, without incurring the penalty of the law. Neither mistress nor maid had foreseen this in time, though Marcelle took heaven to witness that she had felt inspired to shut the door in Mamselle Noel's face! The other servants had fled at the first suspicion of danger.

According to madame's orders, Noel was to remain in that quarter of the house where she now was. This part of the large mansion, separated from the apartment of Madame Chrétien by a broad transverse hall, contained, besides Noel's bedchamber, the dining-room, the salon, and the boudoir of the mistress of the house. Mamselle Noel might visit these at will; she could also descend into the garden at her pleasure; she must, however, beware of the night dews. A trained nurse was in attendance upon the patient, but Marcelle

would be permitted — *pairmeet*, mon Dieu! — to go in and out of the sick room. The other domestics having departed, she, Marcelle, would prepare the food of Mamselle Noel — and of that tr-r-enn-nurse. But le docteur Grafton had ordered that Mamselle Lepeyre, being totally unacclimated, should come in contact with no one, not even Marcelle, who had had the fever — oh, but yaas, in '57, when the fievre jaune *was* the fiev'! Therefore mamselle would have the goodness to fix, on the spot, the hours most agreeable for her early coffee, her breakfast, and her dinner. She would find these promptly on the table in the dining-room. Unhappily, mamselle would have to serve herself — pigs, imbeciles, cabbage-heads of cooks and maids! Seven, twelve, and five o'clock? Très bien. At the service of mamselle. Also, the chambre à coucher of Mamselle Noel would be set in order during



her temporary absences. All this madame herself had arranged, though burning with fever. It must be carried out *au pied de la lettre* since madame could no longer —

A dry sob shook the old woman's bosom as she concluded her rapid harangue. She stepped from the window-nook and turned away.

"But," cried Noel, running after her, and shrinking back again at Marcelle's stern gesture, — "but, Marcelle, wait. Listen. I am not afraid. I have nursed a great many sick people already. One little child, who died on my knee! I am not afraid! I must see my aunt. I wish to nurse her myself. Take me to her, now. Now!"

Marcelle almost smiled at the imperious tone. "You are not h'allow', mamselle. Madame has give hair order, they are of iron. You will be h'alone, true. But eet will be but for some

days," she added, rather to herself than to her listener.

"I do not mind being alone," cried Noel. "I am used to that! But — surely I may see her! I may at least see her?"

"Those order of Madame Chrétien, they are of iron," repeated Marcelle monotonously.

"Then, how am I to know how she is?"

"With the morning coffee of mamselle — at which, hélas, she must serve hairs — pigs, imbeciles, cabbage-heads of maids! — she will receive the news of madame. Also, there ees a bell in the salle-à-manger. Mamselle can communicate eef absolutement necessary. But not *otherwise*. I have forgot!" Marcelle turned back once more to add, "Mamselle Noel will find in hair armoire that trousseau which Madame Chrétien has prepare'. Ma-

dame Chrétien has order' hair niece to wear those robe. C'est tout, mamselle."

Noel listened to her retreating footsteps; they echoed down the long stairway and died away in the silence below. She did not as yet realize the strangeness of her situation. She even laughed a little, remembering the precise phraseology of Madame Chrétien's femme de chambre, as she swallowed the cup of fragrant black coffee from the tray beside her doorsill. Then she felt a pang of remote, intangible pity for the woman lying sick in another part of the house; then a procession filed swiftly through her brain, and vanished, leaving her heartsick — a ghostly procession of guardians and warders, which began with the shadowy figure of her father, and ended with step-aunt Mitchell lying in her coffin-bed, white and placid, and — at last — still.

But the heartache passed like the

procession. She felt buoyant in spite of herself. She no longer wished to go back to step-aunt Mitchell's cousin, Louisa Marsh !

She crept again into bed, and notwithstanding a ray of sunlight which struck full upon her closed eyelids, she fell asleep once more.



## VI

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### Monday

**T**O Noel Lepeyre, accustomed to the cramped shed - room to girlhood consecrated in west Texas, her bedchamber in Madame Chrétien's city house appeared almost awesomely imposing. The furnishings were quaint and old-fashioned. There was a Psyche dressing-table draped with dotted muslin ; and a cheval glass, much spotted and discolored within its heavy carved frame. A bronze clock, silent and sombre on the mantel, bore the date of the first French Empire. There were a tall rosewood secretary, a claw-footed centre-table, and a high-backed chair with an embroidered footstool before it. A prie-dieu with faded brocade cushions occupied one recess ; a spindle-legged lamp-stand stood in another.

Some quite modern silver toilet articles were scattered about the dressing-table, her own, looking quite homely and shamed, among them. These, Noel discovered upon a closer examination, bore her own monogram, surmounted by a small crest. The slender crystal vases on the table were filled with roses; the white muslin curtains were looped with fresh ribbons. All the repressed girlhood within Noel Lepeyre, with its instinctive love for pretty and dainty things, bubbled to the surface. She danced across the bare polished floor, — which reflected her figure like a still mountain-lake, — to the swinging cheval glass. She surveyed herself, white from head to foot in an embroidered muslin gown from the overflowing armoire. “Ah, Noel! Noel!” she laughed. “No more Black Days, Noel. The White Days are come, Noel, Noel!”

She took a peep, in passing, from the

tall embrasured window in the hall, at the garden, lying dewy-green in the early morning shadows far below, and made her way on down the stair into the breakfast-room. Some quite unknown dishes gave out an appetizing odor from the small table set out with rare china and priceless crystal, and there were strange fruits — golden, tropical, shapely — heaped on a silver salver beside her plate. She nibbled at these with tentative tooth, and pushed the mangoes aside with a wry face. “You are laughing at me, M’sieu Claude Lepeyre!” she cried, nodding at her father’s portrait; “and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Mon Dieu, I have not been born in thees’ouse, like you! And me, I am not h’acquaint with those yellow fruit!” And, pleased by her own mimicry of Marcelle’s quaint speech, she rose and whirled about the room, humming a waltz tune under her breath, and holding out her diaphanous skirts.

From the region beyond the wide dividing hall, where Madame Chrétien lay, already battling for her life, no sound came — not a hushed echo, nor a muffled footfall. Noel gave hardly so much as a thought to that undiscovered country. The sense of physical well-being — a consciousness of luxury, of soft ease, of refinement of surroundings, undreamed of hitherto in her tempest-tossed young life — enveloped her like an aura ; airy visions, impalpable yet intoxicating, wheeled and circled within it. “ White Days, oh, Noel, White Days ! ” she whispered, slipping daintily, and like a Lady of the Olden Tyme, down the stairway into the garden.

The large courtyard — a veritable garden-close — lay in the very heart of the city-block, a warrant of the influence of the Lepeyres under the French colonial régime. One passing along the cobble-



stoned street outside would never have suspected its existence ; a stranger entering it unaware from the shadowy corridor must have stood still, as Noel now did, in an ecstasy of amazement and delight at sight of it. The three-storied stuccoed brick mansion, with innumerable little balconies with wrought-iron railings jutting from its façade, formed the outer barrier of the quadrangle. There were high inclosing brick walls to right and left. A two-storied detached building with wide in-facing galleries ran across the rear end. An enormous wistaria-vine covered the wall on the left, and reaching up a gnarled fist grasped an iron grille which separated the upper gallery of the rear wing from a similar galleried building on the other side of the wall. Save for this building, and a cluster of fantastic purple dormer-windowed roofs high up on the right, Noel could see nothing which suggested the

teeming *ilet* surrounding the sheltered garden. A fountain played in the sunshine near the centre of the court ; two tall moss-grown cisterns with peaked covers stood, one behind the other, in one corner ; a Moorish water-jar with bulging sides was placed in the shade of a clump of bananas near the mouth of the corridor. There were iron benches, painted a vivid green, placed here and there ; one under an orange-tree, another beneath a pillared arcade where a Moorish lamp hung, suspended by linked iron chains from the ceiling ; a third almost within the banana clump. The September sun flooded the court with dazzling light ; the air was sweet with intermingled perfumes ; there was a hum of drowsy bees, a flutter of darting butterflies, an occasional crooning call from a bird hidden somewhere in the dense foliage.

Noel sat down on the bench beneath the orange-tree. She had never seen an

orange-tree — bearer of bridal blossoms, bringer of luscious fruit ! and she remained ignorantly indifferent to the glossy canopy above her head, while her eyes roved eagerly about, taking note of other trees and shrubs. A stately magnolia caught and held the sunlight on its broad stiff leaves in a most wonderful fashion. There were a couple of scraggy sweet olives, which the stranger disdained, not yet in touch with their insignificant but precious tufts of yellowish white flowers ; and an opoponax, with feathery branches tossing lightly in the river breeze. A row of crape myrtle-trees pressed against the south wall their bushy spheres of crinkled white and red.

Marvelous ! Noel leaned her head against the scarred trunk of the orange-tree. Narrow walks flagged with stone ran in and out among the luxuriant flower-beds. She saw, in the soft silence, with wide open, dreaming eyes,

beautiful ladies in the powder and patches, the hooped petticoats and red-heeled slippers of a past day, gliding about those wandering paths; they were attended by cavaliers in silken coats, flowered waistcoats, and knee-breeches. La Reine Margot, with white pearls melting into her white neck, came after them, "*the most beautiful young Queen that ever was.*" And with her, why surely, *Papa!* She sat up, pleasantly excited. For here, beyond all doubt, was none other than the Queen's Garden of that old Fairy Story which Claude Lepeyre had never wearied of telling to the child upon his knee; and Noel had never wearied of hearing.

Then, where was that Spanish dagger-tree upon whose spiked leaves the Prince from Beyond the Wall wrote his name—with the point of his sword—for a token to La Reine Margot? She sprang up and looked around. The

dagger-tree, which in the Fairy Story "*stood every which way for Sunday*," was huddled up against the crooked stair leading up the galleried wing! She flew to it. It was in bloom — out of season as often happens with the dagger-tree. A great cone of white bells topped one of the bayoneted branches. The sunlight filtering through the translucent bells gave them a cool water-green look from below. Noel searched breathlessly among the sharp-pointed spikes, hoping to find pricked upon one of them, with the point of the Prince's sword, his token to the Queen. There were letters upon two or three — old rusty initials, whose owners, Noel thought, must long ago have perished from the earth. She made out, on one thick, stiff pike, the letters, *A. G.* They had spread with the growth of the leaf into grotesque caricatures of letters. And they seemed to have

been pricked with a blacksmith's nail, rather than with the point of a Damascus blade!

Noel abandoned the quest. She would have plucked one of the waxen green-white blossoms, but the spears rose formidably about them. "The dagger guards his treasures," she said aloud, nodding her head wisely. At that moment a *pape* whirred past her shoulder and darted into the thicket of spears to join his crooning mate there.

"Ah, Love has found out the way!" she cried lightly, as one who has as yet no knowledge — or fear — of the great Mystery; "Love has found out the way!"

She returned to her seat on the iron bench. Wonderful! the old garden-close! its light and shade and color, the fall of its fountain spray, its silence and repose.

"The Gate is locked and the key is lost,  
I'm in this Lady's Garden!"

Noel sang the snatch of an old *danse en ronde* at the top of her clear young voice ; but checked herself with a remorseful glance at an upper window of the mansion, where she had caught a fleeting glimpse of a nurse's white cap, " Poor Tante Marguerite ! " she sighed carelessly.

" It is like Beauty and the Beast," she mused that night, standing before the cheval glass again, and again smiling at her own white-robed image there. " This is the enchanted Palace. There must be a Prince commanding the invisible spirits who cook my food, gather flowers for my room, let down the lace-netting over my bed, and lay out lovely new garments for my wearing ! I should like to tell my school-children at home about it all ! Some night I shall lay my ring on the dressing-table. But not yet ; oh, not yet ! "



## VII

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### Tuesday

**T**HERE was a slip of thin rusty paper tucked in the bunch of white roses beside Noel's plate the next morning. She read the message it contained, while she sipped her coffee: "Madame Chrétien finds herself better."

"Then I shall see her soon," she thought, with a distinct pang of disappointment. She was glad, certainly, that Madame Chrétien found herself better. But — she could not define the source of that *but* which all at once made her dejected and disquieted. Her appetite vanished. She leaned her head on her hand and stared moodily at the dewy roses.

She arose impetuously. "Can it be that I am not glad that Tante Marguer-



ite is getting well? Surely, it is not that I do not wish to see my dear father's only sister!—Tante Marguerite, who has come like an angel into my starved life! It is not that she is stern; that her orders are of iron! Have I not had great-aunt Harlowe?" She laughed whimsically in spite of her distress. "What is it? what is it?" She almost wrung her hands as she asked herself these questions which she was quite unable to answer. One more experienced in the psychology of the emotions would have found the solution readily enough. The dragon-fly just escaped from the chrysalis would have served as an illustration — trying its wings for the first time, giddy with a sense of freedom, and loath to alight! But Noel had never studied the emotions. She had had so few herself — hardly any, in fact, except a dumb acquiescence in the loss of one benefactor, and a dread of the next;

an uncomplaining self-adjustment to new drudgeries ; a brave acceptance of new phases of poverty. Her escape from the chrysalis-shell had been too sudden for instant realization. What she desired — unconsciously — was a short hour in which to breathe and expand a little before creeping back into the cramped envelope — for of course she must creep back the moment another aunt appeared in bodily form !

“ It is because I am selfish — pig, imbecile, cabbage-head of a Noel that I am ! But I will go to her. Oh, at once ! I will go to her at once.”

She rushed across the hall and turned the knob of the door which barred the way to Madame Chrétien's apartment. Her face expressed involuntary relief. The door was locked.

She returned to the dining-room and breakfasted gayly. “ At any rate it is not for to-day,” she exclaimed, with reckless philosophy.

A door, hitherto closed, leading from the *salle-à-manger* into a stately drawing-room stood open. It had evidently been left open purposely. Noel stepped over the threshold and halted for some seconds trying to accustom her eyes to the semi-obscurity within. Then she looked around eagerly expecting, she knew not what. A funereal atmosphere pervaded the dim vastness. The antique furniture, cumbrous, obsolete, and handsome, which would have made the mouth of a collector water with longing desire, repelled the country-bred young girl. The priceless pictures on the walls were wellnigh meaningless to her uneducated eyes; great dark forest landscapes, peopled with fleeing nymphs and pursuing gods; Greek temples once white, now fallen yellow and cracked on their wooded heights; sallow martyrs, blue-mantled virgins, sombre crucifixions.

A rumble of street noises—the rattle of wheels over uneven stones, the cries of street venders, shrill laughter, the echo of high-keyed voices—came in through the closed front windows. Noel essayed to throw up a sash and look out, but all the sashes were immovable in their frames. She desisted and brushed the dust from her white gown. She felt, indeed, but a mild curiosity concerning the street as she remembered it—close, narrow, swarming with strange peoples. How long ago it seemed, that Sunday night! How remote her association with Major John Steele, dear old man!

Besides, the garden was calling her, drawing her, wooing her to its perfumed silence, its sunlighted repose! She picked up a book which was lying on one of the dust-clad buhl tables, and went down the stair.

She chose the bench, this time, which

was shaded by the clump of bananas; and abutted on the Moorish jar. The jar, crossed by a shaft of sunlight, glistened many colored; there were splotches of emerald green on its rounded sides, purple streaks around its wide throat, yellow and red and velvety-brown stains blending into each other about its huge shoulders.

The banana leaves whispered to the invisible wind which stirred their fringed edges. One perfect blade, broad, shapely, and tenderly green, curled over the mouth of the water-jar; one closely furled, like a banner on its staff, stood up, stiff and motionless, pointing to the blue sky.

Noel opened the small gilt-edged volume she held in her hand. It was a copy of Moore's "Melodies." On the fly-leaf she found Madame Chrétien's maiden name, Marguerite Lepeyre; beneath, the initials, A. G.; and the quotation, faded and almost illegible:

“Where a leaf never dies in the still blooming  
bowers,  
And the bee banquets on through a whole year of  
flowers !”

She read the lines with eyes and senses drifting about the quiet courtyard. “Why, I remember that !” she murmured, suddenly seizing a gossamer thread of memory. “In the Fairy Story ! It is from the song the Prince used to sing to La Reine Margot ! *And there was a big-bellied jar in which the Queen’s Henchman used to bide, and spring up at her, and frighten her, when she was but a teensy-weensy Princess like you.* I know this is that jar !” She jumped up, letting Moore’s “Melodies” tumble to the ground, and peeped cautiously into the disused jar, standing on tiptoe to do so. A little dark pool of water in the bottom within gave back a reflection of her face surrounded by its aureole of sunny hair. A spider’s

web, spun across the top, held the light with its airy filaments and seemed a mesh of silver.

"I suspect that the Queen's Henchman was my father himself," Noel mused, drawing back, with a finger on her lip. The discovery pleased her, lending an added charm to the garden and the half-remembered Fairy Story. But who was the Prince?

"Oh, and *The Prince one day threw a red rose over the wall. And the rose fell at the Queen's feet.*"

A rose vine clambered up a pillar of the gallery on the rear wing; it reached the second story, and threw out long swaying branches with reckless prodigality; but there was only one blossom in sight — a great red rose, half-blown, which swung in the breeze; so red, so high, so challenging, so beautiful!

Noel ran breathlessly across the garden up the crooked outer stair to the

upper gallery, and stretched out a masterful hand. But even as her fingers closed around the coveted prize, they relaxed their grasp, her arm dropped nerveless to her side. She drew back. Something had stirred the air quite near her. Something? A sigh! Not a mere animal exhalation. Not a half-groan of weariness, as a sigh often is, not a satisfied inspiration; not the voiceless expression of despair—none of these! A longing, passionate, murmurous vital breath,—a breath to be felt and understood, but not described. Noel felt it to the core of her being. The doors behind her were shut. The batten window blinds were fastened. There was no more movement or sound within them than in the great silent mansion on the farther side of the garden, where the sick woman lay, and her nurses and doctors came and went, incessantly, noiselessly, anxiously.



Noel listened. The sigh was not repeated. But she turned and sped down the crooked stair, leaving the red rose on its stem.

“It must have been the Beast!” she laughed, with her hand on her heart.

She returned to her garden seat. But a change — a change mysterious, inscrutable, undefinable, had come over the garden; into the sunshine, upon the flower-beds, the trees, the whispering banana leaves, the falling spray of the fountain! She felt herself suddenly alone; a desire for companionship possessed her; a sick longing seized her which seemed to turn all her body, now hot, now cold.

All night long she tossed on her bed enveloped in fevered dreams, — strange, unaccountable dreams. She awoke from time to time, trembling and shivering, yet smiling vaguely. Once, she started up half asleep, stretching out her

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white arms to the white moonlight which  
fell across her pillow, and murmuring :

*The Prince threw a red rose over the  
wall.*

*And it fell at the Queen's feet.*



## VIII

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### Wednesday

**M**ADAME Chrétien finds herself better."

Noel laid down the little slip of rustly paper; then took it up again thoughtfully. Precisely the same message as that of yesterday; the same measured bit of paper; the same fine, old-fashioned handwriting. How was it possible that she had not sooner recognized that handwriting? Yes, Tante Marguerite must have written these messages herself when she felt the fever creeping into her veins. She had given them to Marcelle with the other minute instructions — to be laid before her, Noel, daily! She divined it all in one of those flashes which illuminate the dark places. Something had sharpened her spiritual insight; a sigh had blown

open her soul as the wind lays bare the core of a rose !

A wave of tenderness overwhelmed her. She flew again to the forbidding door, and rapped upon it, softly, entreatingly ; then louder, insistently. She wept when no response came — except an echo which was like a ghostly groan. She no longer wished to delay her meeting with that dear sister of her dead father. She was impatient to kneel by the bedside, to lay the beloved head against her own strong, young shoulders. The yellow fever? But why should she be afraid? She, who had never known an ache or a pain in her life! “Marcelle! Marcelle!” she called vainly. “Let me in.”

She returned to the dining-room to scan the message yet again. “Madame Chrétien finds herself better.” “Perhaps, after all, she has written it this morning,” she suggested to herself

hopefully. "She is better; I shall see her soon. I shall see her to-morrow!"

She clung nervously to this hope. She was used indeed, since her father's death, to being much alone. She could remember long days at great-aunt Harlowe's, when she played ladies, alone, afraid to whisper in a corner of the musty old house, lest the gray-faced old woman, dozing in an armchair upstairs should awake to scold. Under the reign of step-aunt Mitchell, she had dwelt, inwardly at least, in a world apart from her dull surroundings. Until now there had somehow seemed nothing strange or unnatural in her present isolation. Nay, she had reveled in it; she had desired a moment since to prolong it! But she was all at once oppressed by the loneliness, the solitude and silence. This was the third day since she had looked into a human face. Hardly a sound of human life during

that time had fallen upon her ears. Afterward she learned that there was a side court with a separate entrance from the street to the other part of the house; a small stairway by which the physicians came and went. Old Marcelle slipped in and out of the infected apartment like a shadow; choosing the hours when Noel was sleeping, or sitting in the garden, to fulfill the charge imposed upon her of caring for the physical comfort of Madame Chrétien's new-found treasure. Doctor Grafton, lifelong friend and family physician, took note of the young stranger from the windows of the sick-room; it was he indeed who had warned her from the stair-landing the morning after her arrival. His patient, through his watchful eyes, had followed her movements from time to time about the sunny close below — "Claude's daughter! Claude's daughter!" The cry was ever upon the sick woman's lips.

But Noel could not know this ; nor that the city itself, girdled by a fast narrowing cordon of quarantine, was scorching in the breath of the pestilence ; she felt only the unbroken solitude ; she heard only — a sigh !

She picked up the fat little Moore from the flagstones where it had lain forgotten through the night. The crumpled leaves were soaked with dew ; the covers were swollen and distorted. She regarded it remorsefully a moment, then hastened to the bench beneath the orange-tree, and placed it, open, in the warm sunshine to dry. “Careless Noel,” she apostrophized herself sternly.

But her remorse dissolved in the transport of a new sensation. Looking idly up into the thick boughs above her head, she saw — oranges ! They hung among the clustering leaves like so many

green and gold lanterns. She touched one with the tip of an up-stretched finger, thus putting herself into communication with far-off islands of citron and spice, of lithe brown lads and slender, large-hipped girls,—the land of the pomegranate and the nightingale, the land of the Thousand and One Nights, the land of the wonderful Fairy Story.

Another touch transformed her into an inquisitive Eve. She looked cautiously around, up at the window which she had rightly divined to be the window of Madame Chrétien's bedchamber, and over toward the vine-clad gallery of the wing, where a single full-blown red rose swayed in the breeze ; then she detached one of the green and gold lanterns, quickly and stealthily. It smelled divinely ; but alas, it was frightfully sour. She hastened with puckered lips to the fountain to wash the green



stain of the rind from her fingers, and the unripe flavor of the pulp from her lips.

The circular basin was ringed with wide-leaved caladiums; water hyacinths grew in the pool, their pale blue pyramids of blossom reflected on its glassy surface. Some goldfish swam lazily in and out among their tangled roots.

A marble Cupid, a-tiptoe on a broad pedestal, guarded the fountain. His wings were partly folded; his chubby hands, outstretched, held the fluted shell from which the water leaped in the air and fell in a musical rainbow shower into the basin below. Noel regarded him critically, as she dried her hands on her pocket handkerchief. "You were not in the Fairy Story," she said finally, addressing him gravely; "therefore I question your right to be in this garden at all. But you must have been here a long time, or led a very disreputable

life. For you look as forlorn and bedraggled as a prairie tramp. Your face is dirty. How dare you have a dirty face, sir?"

Cupid's outblown cheeks were green with mould and mildew. Dust had settled in his eyes and in the corners of his mouth; the spray blown across his head had made a muddy paste there which plastered his breezy curls; a slimy moss hung pendent, like an attenuated beard, from his dimpled chin. "You are disgraceful, positively disgraceful," continued Noel, stepping back to admonish him with uplifted forefinger. "You have no business in this garden. But, since you are here, why I am going to wash your face."

She dipped her handkerchief in the water, and steadying herself on the stone coping of the basin, she tubbed the marble figure with the Saturday night vigor of an ebon materfamilias. It was

a labor of some moments ; and she was quite red in the face when she had finished her self-appointed task, and held her victim at arm's length, proudly surveying the effect. He returned her look with such merry cocksure eyes, his fresh cheeks were so fat, his mouth so roguish, his clean curls so jaunty, his half-folded wings so jimp, his whole bearing so saucily impudent, that she burst into an involuntary laugh.

The laughter, gay, girlish, and infectious, rang through the court. It blended unexpectedly with another laugh which was irrepressibly responsive — and masculine. Noel looked hastily up, and then as quickly down, startled and abashed.

A young man was standing on the upper gallery of the building adjoining the rear wing and on the other side of the brick wall. His figure was partly concealed by the leafy sprays of the wistaria, but Noel, in one swift glance,

had remarked that the curls clustering on his white forehead were dark. His eyes were also dark ; the slight mustache shading his upper lip was brown. His face was young and frank, with a hint of authority in the square chin and firm lips.

Noel stumbled rather than stepped from her perch, barely escaping a tumble into the pool ; and tossing her bare head in sign of contempt, or indifference, marched off into the house without vouchsafing a second glance at the intruder ; for she so characterized him, although he stood on his own side of the iron grille and merely looked — and laughed ! — down into his neighbor's garden.

Was she really contemptuous ? Was she really indifferent ? She did not herself know. She sat down in the high-backed chair in her own room ; her knees trembling from the hurry of her

flight up the stair. But she got up immediately and stole to the arched window in the hall whence she could see the courtyard far below, aglow with the afternoon sunshine. Alas, a small octagonal tower-like bay-window with conical roof, which clung to the lower hall, — heretofore an object of unmeasured admiration, — hid the corner of the gallery over the way where the laughter had stood. “Ugly, useless, ridiculous little turret!” pouted Noel, returning, baffled, to her high-backed chair. “Besides, how dared he laugh! Impudent creature! I will never go into the garden again. No. Never!



## IX

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### Thursday

**I** WILL never go into the garden again," she repeated the next day.

The slip of rustly paper, neatly folded as usual and bearing the same cheerful message, was in its accustomed place. She read it, listening for the messenger who should summon her to the writer. "For, I shall see her to-day, I know," she thought, adding irrelevantly, "I wonder if the Prince had dark hair!"

But no messenger appeared, and the morning wore slowly away. In an access of impatience, she pushed open a door within the curtained alcove, fancying it might lead somewhere, to somebody! to something which might relieve the monotony of waiting; or bring forgetfulness of the wooing garden!

She found herself in a small room, quite evidently the boudoir of Madame Chrétien. There was a lounge, an easy-chair, a carved work-table with twisted legs. A bit of embroidery, with the needle trailing from it by a strand of purple silk, was lying on the table as if the worker had just laid it down. The femininity of the place appealed to Noel. "Oh, I shall love her! I shall love her!" she exclaimed aloud passionately.

There were several portraits on the walls. One of these was Madame Chrétien herself, a few years older than when she sat, Mademoiselle Marguerite Lepeyre, in white satin and pearls, to a great French painter. She wore the same cordon of pearls around her beautiful bare neck. Her slender arm encircled the shoulders of a child, a little boy whose golden locks glistened like sunbeams against the wine red of her

velvet gown. Her dark eyes were fixed with brooding tenderness upon the glowing young face lifted to hers. Her son! Noel's heart stirred as she remembered old Marcelle's words, "At the cradle, at the schoolroom, at the marriage, at the death of M'sieu, her husband, at the tomb of her only son!"

And the high-featured, hook-nosed old gentleman opposite, blue-eyed, gray-haired, stern, and imperious? "Anatole Thierry Chrétien de la Vigne," declared the lettering carved on the foot of the costly frame. Was *that* the husband of La Reine Margot? Oh, impossible!

"But, who then was the Prince?" demanded Noel of La Reine Margot herself, returning to the dining-room to put the question to the pictured Queen there. Mademoiselle Lepeyre smiled down at her significantly, guarding her secret.

"I shall never go into the garden



again," reiterated Noel, turning disconsolately away. And immediately went.

A furtive examination assured her that there was no one beyond the vine-hung grille. She paced sedately about the walks, stopping to pick up Moore, forgotten (again!) upon the bench. He was now swollen out of all proportion. "How could I be so forgetful! But it was not my fault. Insolent—*person!*" The last words referred, not to the puffed-up Poet, but to the Man who Laughed. She spread the limp pages once more to the sun; they had fallen apart, as if recovering some long-gone habit, at the place, margin-marked, whence A. G. had drawn his quotation: "Where a leaf never dies in the still blooming  
bowers,  
And the bee banquets on through a whole year o  
flowers."

"How could I do it!" repeated Noel tenderly.

She strolled to the fountain to inspect her work of the day before. She had hardly begun, however, when some object came flying through the air with a whizzing sound and lighted plump on Cupid's head. The aim was well taken. The wreath of red roses, awkwardly made and somewhat wilted, rested gracefully on the god's breezy curls. One drooping bud hung over his forehead; he peered out from beneath it with laughter-brimmed eyes. A rose petal or two had blown into Noel's face; they fluttered gently down and rested on her bosom.

The audacious young man, standing in the galleried nook where she had first seen him, grasped a bar of the iron grille and leaned forward. "My name," he said in a low but distinct voice, with his eyes fixed on Cupid, as if he addressed that chubby deity, — "my name is Richard Strong. I have no need to

ask the young lady's name. It is Noel Lepeyre."

She had not deigned to lift her bowed head since her first swift stealthy glance. Now, she stared up at the speaker in frowning surprise. He had drawn back into the shadow of the sheltering wistaria ; she stood irresolute ; but her curiosity got the better of her indignation. She had to walk around a rose-covered lattice, in order to see him. "How did you find out my name?" she demanded in a tone which struggled between haughty reproof and childish wonder.

In reply he held up her pocket handkerchief — the flimsy square of lawn with which she had polished Cupid's face. It had her name in full in one corner, — wrought, perhaps, by Madame Chrétien's loving fingers.

"Oh," she cried, "how did you get it? How dare you keep it!"

“Has not Cupid wings?” he laughed, nodding down at the rose-crowned Boy. “And does he not fly by moonlight? As to keeping what he brings — I have had until this moment no conscience; but if Miss Lepeyre wishes her property” — He made as though he would cast it at her feet, contriving to flaunt its ragged folds, for the scrubbing process had been exacting.

Upon this, Noel laughed, though still pouting a little. “Oh, keep it!” she said carelessly. “It is not worth returning.”

Richard thrust it into his vest pocket with alacrity. “Thank you. Oh, stay!” he entreated, for she was walking away. “That wreath of roses, you know” —

“Did you make it yourself?” she paused to inquire with a peep around the lattice at Cupid, and a little girlish giggle.

"Yes. And I pricked my fingers well into the bargain. Is it not a work of art? You see I wished to celebrate Love's" —

"Scrubbing," suggested Noel promptly.

"We-ll, the word will suffice for the moment," he answered with a smile which brought a flaming red into her cheeks. She turned her back resolutely. But oh, it was so *heavenly* to hear the sound of a human voice once more; any voice! She lingered still, screened by the high rose-lattice, to ask over her shoulder, "Is there a garden there, on your side of the wall?"

He made a grimace. "Not much! There may have been, once on a time, now that you mention it. There is a fountain in the court which does not play; and a broken-nosed cherub watching over its rusty pipes. By Jove, I 'd like to see the daring mortal who would

undertake to get the dust and grime of ages off *his* face!" He laughed, looking contemptuously down at the figure in question. "And there are some forlorn patches which may once have been flower-beds. But it is mostly a dumping-ground for dirt and rubbish, — this courtyard on my side of the wall. That is why I love to look over on your side — I mean that is partly why."

"Marchez, mes enfants! Br-r-r! Comment ça va! Git out!" shouted a hoarse, abrupt voice. It was only a red-headed parrot sitting in a dormer-window high up among the purple roofs. But Noel dipped her head and flew along the paths, up the stairway and into her room, frightened and mystified.

Richard shook his fist at the red-headed parrot, with whose tricks he was already acquainted, and withdrew slowly from the vine-hung corner.



## X

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### Friday

**T**HERE were no flowers on the breakfast-table Friday morning, though Madame Chrétien continued in her precise handwriting to find herself better. Noel was vaguely alarmed. She was sure she heard hurried trappings and uneasy whispering beyond the inexorable partition-wall. She put out her hand more than once to grasp the old-fashioned tasseled bell-rope which hung near her chair. But she was sufficiently experienced in nursing the sick to know that any sudden sound might be fatal to the patient, and she refrained. She roamed restlessly about the sombre parlors and lingered a while in the boudoir — pathetic in its smiling solitude. She reproached herself for having talked lightly, and with

a stranger! while her aunt was lying yonder ill—perhaps, even unto death. She blushed guiltily at the remembrance of her hurried visit at midnight to the moonlighted court, to snatch the fading chaplet from Cupid's head, and creep stealthily back to her bedchamber, hiding it in her arms. "I will throw those dreadful roses away! How dared he keep my handkerchief! How dared he insult me with his absurd stories about—about Cupid! . . . I will never go into that garden again!"

She held to this resolution fiercely, until late in the afternoon, sitting obstinately in her high-backed chair with an illuminated "*Livre d'Heures*" on her knee, her hands clasped idly upon the open page.

At nightfall she descended the stair. She found a seat in an angle of the garden-wall, whence she could not see the reproachful window of the sick-



room, and where the wistaria shut off a view of the grille and the obnoxious gallery-nook. She sat with her elbow on her knee and her chin in her palm, staring absently at an ugly, odd-looking, angular plant growing in a bed near by. There was a single monster flower-bud on the plant, set upon a pink up-curved stem ; a sheath-like calyx of soft pinky spikes enveloped the bud, the points pressed flat against its shapely oval. Noel gradually became conscious that some change was taking place within this sheath ; she leaned forward, instantly alert. As she looked, the unfolding points lifted themselves one by one, and curled slowly outward, until from apex to base the bud was guarded by a phalanx of rosy spears. Then an almost imperceptible movement, a trembling as of some divine forecast, passed over the bud ; the calyx parted a little, and a snow-white gleam appeared, just visible

in the moonlight, which suddenly filled the close. And then, for a long time — or so it seemed to Noel, brooding over the bud — nothing happened. The thick, clumsy leaves of the plant stirred sluggishly in the night breeze, but the bud remained motionless on its up-curved, luminous stem.

“I wonder what it is!” murmured the absorbed watcher at length.

“It is a night-blooming cereus,” said a voice close to her ear. “And we shall see the miracle of its blooming together, Noe — Miss Lepeyre.”

Noel started violently at the touch of his hand on hers, but she did not cry out affrighted, as he doubtless had feared she might.

“How did you come?” she asked gravely, standing up and facing him in the white moonlight.

“‘Love found out the way,’” he quoted lightly.

"But you, at least, have no wings," she objected, shaking her head, and smiling.

"Well, I at least did not need them," he returned gayly. "It would be better indeed if Master Cupid did not have wings," he added, as an afterthought. "In that case he could not fly away, as they say he sometimes does, though I for one do not believe it."

"Never mind about Cupid," she said hastily. "Tell me truly how you came. Not by the great street-door with the grinning knocker upon it? That, I know, is barred and bolted and double-locked. For I have been down the corridor to see."

"No; not by that door. Not by any door. The truth is — Look yonder, where the wistaria-vine catches and clasps the iron grille." He drew her a few paces forward. "It must be a hundred years old, that wistaria! The

vine has the girth of my body. Well, I stepped up on the railing of my gallery, caught the grille with one hand, set a foot out upon the gnarled twist of that old vine, swung myself around, and dropped down upon your gallery — the gallery where you came, once on a time, to pluck a rose, and did not ! Why did you run away from that rose ? ”

“ And then ? ” demanded Noel, ignoring the question.

“ Then I slipped down the stair, glided across the court, and found you. Is that exact enough, Miss Noel Lepeyre ? ”

“ So ! ” cried Noel, clasping her hands in sudden excitement ; “ you came by Claude’s Way ! ”

Richard looked mystified. “ Claude’s Way,” he echoed.

“ Yes. That is the way, you know, by which the Prince used to come. I remember now ! To see La Reine

Margot, in her garden — this garden ! They called it ‘ Claude’s Way.’ I do not know why. But my father was the Queen’s Henchman.” Richard listened with but indifferent interest to this incoherent outburst. He was devouring her face with his eyes, — the beautiful, pale, sensitive face ! When she ceased speaking, he repeated mechanically, “ The Queen’s Henchman ! ”

But when she began to tell him the Fairy Story — the story of the young Queen, and of the Prince who was forbidden under pain of death to speak to his Love ; or even so much as to look at her, with all the world, when she rode abroad, lovely and gracious, in her state coach ; or when she danced with her royal partners at the court balls — Richard led Noel back to her seat and placed himself beside her to listen. “ He was forbidden ever to approach La Reine Margot, the Prince was,”

said Noel, "but he came by 'Claude's Way' into her garden."

"Like myself," interrupted Richard.

"But the Prince came many times," cried Noel; and bethinking herself, flushed rosy red in the moonshine.

"True," said Richard boldly; "and so shall I come many times! And the Prince and the Queen lived happily ever after, of course?"

"No," she faltered, "I fear that they did not. Something happened. My father never told me what happened. But the Prince ceased to come by 'Claude's Way;' and the Queen married a wicked and hard old King with blue eyes. And the Henchman quitted her service and went away; and he never saw her again, though he loved her always."

"And the Prince?"

"I do not know what became of the Prince." She sighed unconsciously.

"I know," said Richard in a very low voice. "He died. That is what I should do, if" —

"The Henchman was my father," Noel went on hurriedly, "and he is dead. And La Reine Margot is my aunt. She is ill yonder in her room; and I have never seen her," she concluded forlornly.

"The white-haired old lady who lives here?" asked Richard.

"But! She is not old!" cried Noel indignant. "How can you say that!"

"I saw you," he said, putting the criticism aside, "the day you first came into this court. You came along the walk just as I looked over the grille. I have looked over here for many months, you know, every morning."

"Because of the dreariness and the ugliness of the courtyard on your side of the wall," she interpolated.

"Because of my mother," he said softly, "who used to love flowers, and

tended them in our old plantation rose-garden up the river; and who is dead."

"Oh!" breathed Noel in a tender voice.

"I used to watch the white-haired old lady — who is not old! — walking about this garden, leaning upon the arm of a high-turbaned old negro woman" —

"Marcelle," murmured Noel.

— "or sitting on a bench in the shade. Lately, she has held a letter in her hand which she has kissed many times and read over and over to her old servant."

"Could that be my letter?" queried Noel under her breath.

"One day she did not come into the courtyard at the usual hour; perhaps she did not come at all. But the next morning — you came."

He was silent a moment. "Oh, oh, the bud is quivering!" cried Noel as he opened his lips to speak again. "What is going to happen?"





## XI

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### The flower

**T**HEY bent forward together, their locks — the dark and the blond — intermingling, and watched the bud. An almost imperceptible quiver ran along the stem; the invisible bonds about the calyx loosened yet more; the tiny spear-points curled outward and fell away, revealing a glimmer as of gold in an ivory chalice.

“It is about to come into bloom,” Noel said in an awed whisper.

“You had on a white frock, as you have now,” Strong continued, turning to her again. “Your head was bare; your hair shimmered like sunlight under sunlight. You trod the paths lightly, as if your feet scarcely touched the ground. I held my breath looking at you, for I feared from moment to mo-

ment, that you might vanish from my sight. I could not see your face at first; but you looked up at the yucca bells, and I saw it! I wonder, Noel, if you know how beautiful you are! I heard your voice when the *pape* flew into the dagger-tree. 'Love has found out the way,' you said. You have the sweetest voice, Noel, that I have ever heard! I have been watching you from behind that grille ever since. Why have you delayed so long your coming? Where were you before? And why are you always alone?"

She told him of herself, orphaned and lonely for so many years; of the pale, frail young mother—who died; of the passionately loved father—who died; the guardians who had come into and passed out of her life. She described the little country school and the shock-headed school-children; and second cousin Louisa, with her lopsided buggy!

of her own timid letter to the hitherto undreamed-of sister of her father, and of Madame Chrétien's letter in reply.

"And so I came at last to this house where my father was born ; and to this garden where he used to play when he was a little boy. He has described it to me a thousand times over in that old Fairy Story which we both loved so. Is it not wonderful ? But I have not even seen my aunt Marguerite. She is ill, very ill, I fear. She has the yellow fever" —

"What !" the interruption was a hoarse cry of alarm ; he threw out an arm as if to shield her from some tangible danger. "Madame Chrétien has the fever ! Oh, you must go away. You must not approach her room. Promise me, promise me !"

\* "But, indeed, I would see her ! I would nurse her if they would allow me. I long to go to her !"

"Promise me," he insisted.

"Is it then so terrible, the yellow fever?" she asked, incredulous.

"It is very terrible," he replied.

"There is a great deal of it in the city.

There are flags everywhere, marking the infected houses, and guards are placed at the doors to prevent people from entering or coming out. The entrance to my own quarters is from an

alley, so I have not seen the flags on this house-door. I did not know there

was fever here. Many people are dying.

The dead are buried almost before —

Oh, promise me that you will not enter Madame Chrétien's room, no matter what may happen. Promise!"

"But you, are you then keeping quite out of the reach of danger?"

"Oh, I! That does not matter. I have lived here a long time. I have never had the fever; but I am not afraid" —

"Neither am I afraid!" interrupted Noel proudly.

"But I am afraid for you. Promise!"

She would not promise. However, when she related her experience of the past few days, and the extraordinary precautions taken by Madame Chrétien to insure her, Noel's, isolation and safety, his fears subsided.

"But what a dreary home-coming for you!" he exclaimed.

"That is nothing. I have been dreary — and alone nearly all my life!" she said. And quite unexpectedly to herself she burst into tears. The tears, she afterward remembered, were sweet; they were shed upon Richard's breast.

"Dear Heart," he answered, "dear little Heart! I love you. I will never let you be lonely again."

"Look! Look!" she cried rapturously, lifting her head. "The flower has come into bloom!"

Snow-white and lovely, like a bride awaiting her bridegroom, the exquisite blossom, wide open, — a radiant wheel, — swayed as if to spirit music on the up-curved bracket-like stem ; the slender petals whispered to some invisible Presence ; the golden heart quivered as if under the caress of an unseen lover.

They hovered over it, hand in hand, breathing the subtle sweetness of its perfume. “ The Flower has come into bloom, Noel, oh my Beloved,” he murmured, drawing her to his breast.

The moon, full and round, a disk of burnished silver, sailed high up in the deep azure sky, bathing them in tender light. Down in the famous old Place d’Armes the cathedral clock rang out the hour : *Nine*.

“ Oh,” he ejaculated in a tone of dismay. “ Why have I permitted you to linger so long in the night air ! Go into the house ; at once, my Noel.”

She clung to him.

"Besides, I must hurry off to my work."

"Work?" she echoed. "At night?"

"Yes. I help to turn the world over every night. I am a reporter." Seeing that she did not understand, "I gather news for a great daily newspaper," he explained.

"Oh!" she regarded him with reverence.

"And I come home long after you have had your beauty sleep, sweetheart."

"And the people in the house, there — where you live" —

"There are none," he interrupted, laughing. "I am the sole inhabitant of that old rookery. The others — lodgers, proprietors, servants — it was a lodging-house, you know — all decamped when the first red and yellow flag appeared on our street — like the pigs, imbeciles, cabbage-heads of your old Marcelle!"

"Then you are lonely too, Richard."

The sound of his name on her lips filled him with rapture. "I *was* lonely," he said, gazing into the shining eyes lifted to his in the moonlight. "But I will never be lonely again!"

"You will come back to-morrow night?" she entreated, as he urged her toward the house.

"The Prince came many times to the Queen in her garden," he quoted jestingly. "Yes, Noel. I will come. When the guards are removed from Madame Chrétien's street-door, I will come by that door—though, like the Prince, I were a thousand times forbidden—and claim you for my wife. Until then I will come by 'Claude's Way.'"

"I am a very poor man, Noel," he turned back to say after he had taken leave of her at the foot of the stair.

"Are you?" Her laughter rippled musically on the moonlit stillness. "I am so glad! So am I. Oh, but poorer



than you can imagine ! Do you know, Richard, I have done much harder scrubbing than upon Cupid's face."

"I will become rich for your sake ! I will make you a Queen !" he cried fiercely. "I will crown you with jewels ; I will build you a palace such as no Fairy Story ever imagined !"

"Noel !" Again he returned to her side. This time his voice was shaken with boyish glee. "You need not trouble any more about the fat little book of poems. Careless Noel ! I have him drying over an oil lamp in my room. He has escaped, you see, though you cannot !"

Upon this, they caught hands and danced like a couple of children in the scented darkness of the corridor, singing softly : —

"I'm in this Lady's Garden !  
The Gate is locked and the key is lost.  
I'm in this Lady's Garden."

She watched him spring up the stairway of the wing, and swing himself around the grille to his own gallery. She waved her hand in answer to his parting signal. Then, after a last glance at the flower, white and mysterious on its shining stem, she went into the house.

All was silent there ; silent as sleep, she thought. She stole to the barred door and laid her cheek lovingly against the unheeding panel. " I love you La Reine Margot," she whispered. " I long to see you. I long to tell you about him — about Richard. You will understand. You know. You remember ! "

And before ascending to her own room, she penned, by the light of the vestibule lamp, a line of loving remembrance to Madame Chrétien and laid it on the breakfast-table where it could not fail to meet Marcelle's eyes.



## XII

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### Saturday

**T**HERE were not only no flowers, but the table had not its usual well-ordered appearance. The breakfast itself showed signs of hasty preparation. Noel's own little note had been picked up and dropped, or thrown aside. It was lying on the floor, and near it Madame Chrétien's daily bulletin, crumpled and torn in half as by some one in a sudden outburst of rage or despair.

At another time these indications might have frightened the girl, who was not unacquainted with the disorder which accompanies alarm in cases of extreme illness. But her eyes were still dazzled by the glory of last night's moon. She barely tasted the lukewarm food ; she was in haste to behold once

more the golden-hearted, white-blooming wonder in the garden ; and by a sight of it to assure herself that the rest of the beautiful dream was true.

She wished to fly down the stair ; she found herself, instead, descending slowly, as if a leaden weight were attached to her ankles. It struck her, too, as she crossed the garden, that the sunshine was too bright ; it gave her a slight sensation of pain about the temples ; the vivid yellow of the nasturtiums in their round bed, the scarlet of the geraniums against the house-wall irritated her nerves. She reached the low brick ledge which the night before had served her — and Richard — for a seat. But she started back, horror-stricken, as she sank upon it. The flower ! An unsightly semblance of a refolded bud drooped upon an inert, discolored stem. A few limp, yellowish white petals straggled from the inclosing

sheath; a sickly odor exhaled from them. It was like a corpse from which even the still beauty of death had departed. Noel touched it caressingly, pityingly, but shrank away, repelled by the cold, damp lifelessness of the thing but yesternight resplendent with vitality.

"Perhaps it is an emblem of" — She shuddered, leaving the sentence unfinished; and rising, moved across the close to look up at the vine-clad gallery corner. There was no one behind the drapery of leaves. "But of course he must be sleeping, if he has been turning the world over all night!" she reflected, her spirits rising again. "And I shall see him to-night."

It was a long day. She spent it, now in the house, chilled by the motionless shadows there; now in the garden, burned by the blinding sun. Her impatience took away her appetite. She

could not eat the ill-cooked food huddled in unseemly disarray on the dinner-table. And she could not drink, though her throat was dry and parched.

"Will night never come!" she exclaimed petulantly into the face of the lingering day. No sound disturbed the silence of house or court except an occasional croak from the parrot in his window up among the purple roofs, "La morte! La morte!" Noel did not understand the words, but their sinister echoes vaguely disturbed her peace.

Nightfall found her seated on the bench beneath the orange-tree. She had wished to await Richard's coming by the brick ledge where he had first found her. But she felt a superstitious dread of that hideous bud. From where she sat, moreover, she could see Claude's Way in the dim starlight,—for the moon had not yet arisen,—and she could also see the pale night-light in the

sick-chamber. There, she presently became aware of moving shadows, formless and indistinct, passing and repassing, hurried and silent. She stood up and strained her eyes by trying to recognize Marcelle's turbaned head; or the nurse in her white cap. But even the shadows had fled.

She reseated herself, and waited.

A broad ray of moonlight fell, after a time, across her lap. She stifled a cry of terror! Her white gown was alive with crawling beetles, black, heavy-winged, and tenacious. She tried to brush them off; but they were creeping up her sleeves, clinging to her throat, caught in the meshes of her hair, alighting with whirring wings on her bosom, falling upon her face. She fought them with frantic hands, running about the court, yet forbearing, even in her fright, to utter a sound, lest Richard — lest Richard —

They were everywhere, loathsome, horrible; crawling along the walks, dashing themselves clumsily against lattices, swinging to flower-buds, dropping heavily upon benches and into jardinières — darkening the very air and filling it with a ghastly, corpse-like odor. Outside, in the streets, there were millions of them — *yellow fever beetles*, superstitious folk called them; brought into being, they declared, by the first fetid breath of the pestilence.

Noel lifted white imploring arms toward Claude's Way; but there was no sound there, or anywhere. Only the nauseous beetles, and the echo of the Cathedral bell down in the old Place d'Armes booming out the passing hours.

At midnight Noel reëntered the house. She dragged herself up the steps, pale and exhausted by her solitary vigil. Her garments were dank with the noisome night dews; their folds



were heavy with the sluggish black creatures whose presence she had long ceased to note.

She moved like a ghost to the closed door and fell upon its threshold. The silence beyond it, she thought, was like the silence of death. "If I could but see you, La Reine Margot," she sobbed. "To tell you! You know. You understand. You remember. For the Prince ceased to come to you also, in your garden."



## XIII

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### Sunday

**T**HE Sunday stillness was the most terrifying yet. But stay, *was* it Sunday? Noel leaned her head back against the orange-tree and tried to think. A dull pain gnawed at her heart, and the throbbing of her temples confused all her outer and inner senses. Last night, with its long fruitless watch, seemed as remote as the beginning of the world. And Friday night; and the blooming of the flower; and Richard — Nay, but all this was a dream!

She had come straight to the garden from her bedchamber, not entering the breakfast room. The very thought of food was sickening. Besides, what might she not find there to add certainty to her growing apprehensions! And

she longed to sit in the sunshine and get warm. She was cold — cold to the very marrow of her bones. The life-blood seemed to have congealed in her veins.

She looked around with bloodshot eyes, whose luminous gray was faded to a wan yellow. The unkempt walks were thick with dead beetles; the fountain, choked with them, had stopped playing. The stagnant pool at Cupid's feet held a distorted reflection of his nude, winged figure; he leered at the girl from under dust-begrimed brows. Rank incense from the triple-horned datura shading his shoulders hung in the air.

Madame Chrétien's window blinds were flung wide open. The wistaria branches along the south wall rose and fell monotonously in a hot wind which seemed to Noel to blow down from the north pole. The sun beating upon her

uncovered head drove an ice-cold spike into her brain.

Her head drooped to her breast. She slept, or at least she dreamed.

She dreamed that great-aunt Harlowe had thrust her out of the musty old house at home, and that she was wandering, wandering, wandering, over the deserted prairie—wide and bare as eternity—barefoot, shivering, in her little muslin slip, and calling, calling, calling for Papa. Only Papa's name was not Claude—but Richard. And Richard would not answer. . . . The heavens opened; Judgment Day was come; blood-red and awful—as her black mammy had always foretold. A mighty thunderbolt rent the world in twain; the dead came forth from their graves; gibbering in their long shrouds, and pointing. . . . She opened dazed eyes. The knocker on the street door was clanging loudly. Its echoes rever-

berated up and down the corridor. She heard a falling bar, the pushing aside of a bolt, and the opening of the door; then a noise as of feet on the pavement within—feet that advanced shuffling slowly and heavily. She started up, fell back dizzy and weak, and started up again. A frightful premonition came to her of the meaning of those shuffling feet. Men's voices in hoarse whisperings mingled with the approaching sound.

A terrible fascination drew her gaze toward the corridor; the echoing tread came nearer; and now the heavy feet were on the uncarpeted steps. The men were hidden from view by an angle of the wall, but the thing they carried dipped, with their ascent, toward the ground, and she saw—the end of a coffin.

She opened her blue lips, but no sound issued from them. She tried to

lift her hands ; they fell helpless and inanimate in her lap. She wished to fly from the court and hide herself in her room ; her feet refused to move.

Only after an eternity — it was in reality but a few moments — when she heard those heavy feet descending the stair again, slowly, carefully, as if bearing a heavier burden, she crept, stooping, to the rose-lattice and crouched behind it, shutting her eyes lest she should see the Black Thing again.

As the street door opened once more, a wild wail broke the Sunday stillness. Noel recognized Marcelle's voice. She heard her forsaken, heart-rending cry, muffled and far away, long after the ponderous door was shut and barred. The faithful old bonne, then, was following her mistress to the tomb, as she had followed La Reine Margot's only son ! "She is dead ! She is dead ! And I shall never see her !" whispered

the half-crazed girl, staring through the lattice with dry eyes. She dared not move, but cowered in her hiding-place, while the sun sank in a sea of sulphur-colored cloud. For one instant a flame-like haze filled the court; then night fell suddenly, dark, mysterious, and ghostly. The beetles, which had seemed dead, lifted their shell-like wings and flew aimlessly hither and thither, thickening the air; and a poisonous smell stole down on the vapory air from the infected mansion, and mingled shamelessly with the pure scent of the night-blooming jessamine, and the rank breath of the triple-horned datura.

"I dare not stir," Noel muttered. "They will see me and make me go in. I cannot go in. I am afraid. And I am too tired to climb that stair. It is so high! So high!"

She need not have feared spying eyes, poor child. There was no one in the

great dark house, except Marcelle, returned from the hasty burial of her adored mistress. And old Marcelle had forgotten Noel's existence !

"I am so lonely," she sighed. "And so tired. And I ache so horribly. But I dare not move. I cannot climb that dreadful stair !"

But she did at length start to her feet. She stood, heedless of the flying beetles, her head thrown back, her ear attentive, her hands clasped as if in supplication, her heart beating violently. The sound fell again upon the unnatural silence of the night — a groan, and then something like a muffled call, or cry.

Her ankles were no longer weighted with lead ! A stair as high as that which once led to Babel's Tower would not have daunted her. She flew with the speed of a woodland fawn, not into the mansion, but up the wing-stairway, and



along the upper gallery, to the grille. His voice! Her name! *Noel. Noel.* She distinctly heard him call her name.

"Ah, I might have known!" she murmured in a tone of self-reproach. "He is sick, my Richard. He is calling me. I am coming Richard. It is I. Noel!" she called in a clear silvery voice. She stepped upon the low railing, grasped an iron bar of the grille with a firm hand, set one foot upon the gnarled twist of the wistaria-vine, swung herself out into mid-air, and dropped, light as a bit of thistle-down, upon Richard's balcony.

He was lying, half dressed, upon a low couch in the small gallery room. His light burned dimly in the smoking student-lamp on the table. A litter of loose sheets of scribbled writing-paper was scattered over the table and on the floor beside the couch. The flower she had pinned on his coat — a bit of

sweet olive — was in a tumbler of water beside the discolored copy of Moore.

This was all that Noel saw as she paused timidly on the threshold. His face against the pillow was ghastly pale. His eyes were fixed and glassy. But some intuition drew them in her direction, and he started up, stretching out his arms. "Noel! Noel!" he called ecstatically.

A spasm of pain contracted his brows; it seemed to awaken him sharply to a sense of her danger. "Do not come in, Noel! You shall not touch me, I tell you! Go away, Noel, I command you! Do you not see that I have the fever — the *yellow fever*," he shrieked frantically. "Go away, Noel."

He fell back upon his pillows and delirium seized him once more. "She was in the garden," he muttered. "I saw her, white like a white dove. But she would not stay. She has the sweet-

est voice I ever heard. And we saw the flower come into bloom together. *Max!* " he cried with a sudden change of tone. " You have cut off my hand ! Why did you cut off my hand ? My copy will never be ready ! " He struggled up again and stared wildly around. But Noel had come swiftly across the bare floor to lay her hand on his breast. She forced him gently backward. He breathed her name again softly. She fell to her knees beside the couch and took his burning hands in hers.

" I shall never be lonely again as long as I live," she sighed, laying her head beside his on the damp pillow.



## XIV

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### Claude's Way

**D**OCTOR Andrew Grafton was sitting alone in his office that Sunday night. The famous physician was a tall, spare man, with a look of great strength and vigor about his person, despite his sixty-odd years. His hair and beard were gray. The square under jaw and the set lips gave a stern expression to his face ; but his dark eyes were mild and benignant.

A bundle of letters tied with a faded ribbon lay on the desk at his elbow ; he held in the palm of his hand the miniature of a young girl. He gazed steadily at her pictured face ; and her red lips smiled innocently back at him ; her white satin gown was stiff with embroidery of pearls, and a string of milk-white pearls melted into her beautiful neck.

"I loved you, Marguerite," he whispered. "I have loved you, and none but you, my whole life long. You were torn away from me in life; and in death you are farther away from me than ever! For you are lying in your stately tomb beside the husband they chose for you, with your little golden-haired son at your feet. And Claude, who quarreled with you for my sake, and went away, we knew not whither—he, too, is gone. And I only am left"—

A step sounded in the outer room. He closed the locket with a snap, and swept it with the bundle of letters into an open drawer.

"Doctor," called the fresh-faced medical student from the doorway, shading his eyes with his hand; "are you there?"

"Yes," returned the doctor, with unaccustomed curtness. "I am here. What do you want?"

Max Warren drew a step nearer. "Are you going down to see Madame Chrétien again to-night, doctor?"

"Madame Chrétien died this afternoon. I have just returned from her funeral."

His tone awed the younger man. "Oh, I beg pardon, Doctor Grafton. I did not know;" he lifted his hat reverently. "I will get some one else." He turned to go.

"Stay, Max," called the doctor, mastering himself instantly. "What was it you wanted, my boy?"

"Nothing; that is—I have to go to the hospital myself, and I thought if you were in Madame—in that neighborhood, you know, you might see if anything is wrong with Dick Strong."

"Why, has he the"—

"No, no; I trust not," interrupted Max hastily. "But he did not show up at all at his office last night; and he

has not been to the 'Pen and Pencil' to-day. So I thought — Dick is such a regular old chap — Don't trouble yourself, doctor. We are all apt to forget how tired you must be. I'll go myself, later."

"No." Doctor Grafton had already put on his hat and was looking around for his cane. "Now that you speak of — of Madame Chrétien, I remember that I did intend to go there to-night. I had forgotten." A ghost of a sigh escaped his lips. "A young girl — the niece of Madame Chrétien, her only brother's child, arrived at her house a week ago. She has been kept out of the reach of danger. But I must look after her at once. I will see Dick as I go down. I hope the lad is all right."

"Thank you, doctor. A gallery room in the wing of the old lodging-house, just this side of — of Madame Chrétien's."

“Claude’s little girl,” mused the old doctor, striding along the hushed street. “How Marguerite clung to the life for which she had long ceased to care, in the hope of seeing Claude’s daughter! And I, in my selfish desolation, had quite forgotten the child!”

He forgot her again, although he was now her guardian and the trustee of the large property devised by Madame Chrétien to her sole heir — “my beloved niece and adopted daughter, Noel Lepeyre.” His thoughts were again busy with the past; so busy that it was by instinct, and not through any recollection of Richard Strong, that he shoved open a heavy batten door which was unlocked and sagged a little on its giant hinges; and passed along a familiar but long unvisited corridor. As he entered the dilapidated court he paused and stared uncertainly around, like one awakening from a dream. Here was



the close, once a blooming Paradise, like the one just over the mossy brick wall, where he had played as a boy, and dreamed the flattering dreams of youth and early manhood. It was filled with the accumulated débris of successive occupants ; a huge rat lumbered across his feet and loped away to the shelter of a tangled thicket of weeds under a jutting balcony. A dreary, monotonous drip-drop echoed from the corner where a leaking cistern huddled against the wall. The house where he was born reared its gloomy façade, dark and silent, against the misty sky. How many years since he had followed his mother's coffin down the corridor, and — the last of his race — quitted the old mansion forever ! Its gradual decay into a common lodging-house had not been unknown to him, but he had never realized it until now. *Faugh !* He stumbled across the cluttered court feeling

his way with careful outstretched cane. "Gallery room? Ah, that must be the room yonder, where a light is burning. By Jove, my own old fencing quarters! I wish the boy had not elected to lodge in this particular house. Well, well, I will see him first; and then for my little ward. Heigh-ho!"

The crooked stair creaked under his feet as he climbed it. Half way up, the soft murmur of a voice—a woman's voice—reached his ear. He turned, half inclined to retreat. "The lad has visitors," he said to himself, with a grim smile. "A visitor! Evidently I am not needed here!"

Nevertheless he strode on.

"My God!" He stood rooted to the sill of the open door. Richard's face, from pale had become livid; his eyes were closed, the damp hair clung to his forehead, and heavy beads of perspiration stood on his temples. He lay

quite still, like one dead. But Noel, kneeling beside his couch with her golden head against his shoulder, and his hands in hers, was babbling volubly. A bright spot burned scarlet in either cheek; her eyes rolled wildly; she moistened her parched lips incessantly with a red tongue.

The lamp gave out a stifling smell. The heavy atmosphere reeked with contagion.

"My God!" repeated Doctor Grafton.

Noel looked up, a gleam of consciousness dawning into her eyes. "I heard him call," she whispered. "And I came to him. Hush! You must not awaken him. He is very sick. He has the yellow fever. And La Reine Margot is dead, and I will never see her."

"Noel!" Doctor Grafton spoke sharply, seeking to arrest the fleeting

intelligence. "How did you get out — how did you come here?"

"I — I?" she smiled. "I came by Claude's Way. And I will never be lonely again as long as I live. Ah-h-h. See! The end of a coffin! Judgment Day has come!"

He did not hear her shuddering shriek. "*Claude's Way*." Even as he advanced rapidly toward the two forlorn young creatures thus thrown together by the strangest of chances, his heart was swelling with poignant emotion. "Claude's Way." The "Course Perilous," so named by Claude Lepeyre and himself when they were boys; the way by which they came and went stealthily, secure from stern, forbidding eyes. The way by which he, Andrew Grafton, sometime called the Prince, grown to manhood, was used to enter by night the garden of his father's life-long enemy — nay, the pleasure of

his Lady, the garden of La Reine Margot! The way so long untrodden by a dispossessed Prince. "Claude's Way." Love's way!

With these memories whirling through his brain, the old doctor had caught up a woollen shawl from the foot of the couch, and was wrapping Noel in its folds. He paused to lay a professional hand on Richard's clammy forehead, and to touch the inert wrist. "I will come back in a few moments, Dick," he said in the ear of the unconscious sleeper, "but I fear it is too late. Much too late. Poor boy."

He lifted the girl from the floor. She made no resistance; her hot head fell against his neck; her fevered breath burned his cheek. He clasped the light burden with one powerful arm, as he came out into Richard's leafy watching-place. He seized the iron bar with his right hand, and a second later he was

passing along the well-remembered gallery beyond.

Noel, cradled on his breast, was crooning dreamily : —

“ The Gate is locked and the key is lost !

I 'm in this Lady's Garden.’

The parrot, wakeful on his lofty perch, croaked dismally back, —

“ *La Morte ! La Morte !* ”



## XV

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### Lobe's May

**T**HE late October sunshine, a little hazy and a trifle less dazzling than the sunshine which had first greeted Noel into the Queen's garden-close, fell full upon her one morning, sitting on the bench under the orange-tree. The fountain was playing briskly; Cupid received the light spray on his shining shoulders with a chastened smile; the yellow butterflies hovered like golden motes above the blue cones of the water-hyacinths in the basin. All about was a riot of leaf, tendril, and blossom. It was as if a new summer had entered the close, treading out with beneficent feet all vestiges of that brief and awful moment when decay and death had dwelt there.

Doctor Grafton had fetched a garden

chair for himself from the pillared arcade, and placed it in the walk facing his young ward. He had been telling her of her father's boyhood and his own: of the bitter family feud between the Graftons and the Lepeyres, once, long ago, bound together by ties of closest brotherhood; of the beautiful young girl whom he had loved — and lost; thus piecing out for her the old Fairy Story, making it whole, and more lovely — and oh, how past conceit more sad! Then there was a long silence.

“She is an ugly little creature, my ward,” thought the doctor, looking at her through half-closed eyes. She wore the rusty black frock in which, in company with Major John Steele, she had arrived weeks ago at the gate of the Queen's Garden. Her illness had left her frightfully emaciated and pale almost to deathliness. Her gray blue eyes were heavy; her lips had lost their



rosy bloom ; the corners of her mouth drooped pitifully. " Yes, she is ugly, Claude's daughter. And yet she reminds me, somehow, of Marguerite ! "

" I smell violets," he said aloud.

" You will find them," said Noel languidly, " growing over beyond the cistern under the edge of the wall."

He went and plucked a few blossoms, kneeling on the moist flagstones.

" How well you know this garden," he observed, coming back and handing her the violets.

" Oh," she returned, letting the flowers slip through her transparent fingers, " I lived in this garden a hundred years — once."

Again there was a silence.

" *The gate was locked and the key was lost,*" she half sang, half chanted, smiling sadly at him.

It was a sweet voice. Doctor Grafton, the great musical connoisseur, was

surprised by its underlying strength and timbre.

"By the way, it is yours, you know, Noel — the garden," he said suddenly.

"I do not want it," she interrupted quickly. "I am going home — back — to second cousin Louisa Marsh. She will die of course. Everybody dies."

"Not everybody!" the doctor objected lightly. "You, for example. You" —

"Oh, I!" Noel's lip curled disdainfully. "I mean everybody who means anything; everybody, above all, who has anything to do with me. I am like that tree, you know" —

"The upas," suggested the doctor indulgently.

"The upas. My mother first, and then my father." She told them off, according to wont, on her fingers. "Aunt Hester, and great-aunt Harlowe. Step-aunt Mitchell. And then

my Tante Marguerite, whom I never saw. Then " — the last word was spoken under her breath. She glanced furtively up at Claude's Way and the bit of shaded gallery beyond. Her eyes clouded and drooped.

"Old!" cried the doctor. "Old, all of them! And quite ready to creep out of life. Or else careworn, and disappointed, and miserable. Or too pure and lovely to linger in a world like this." He bared his head and glanced in his turn at the window of the room where Madame Chrétien died. "But when one is young and strong and passionately in love with love and life! That you will admit, Noel, that is different."

She looked at him with suddenly dilated eyes. "Doctor!" she cried, clasping imploring hands. "Doctor Grafton, do you mean that he — that one so very near death can — could" — She leaped to her feet. "How dare you treat me

so!" she burst out angrily, her hands pressed to her breast, her breast heaving painfully? "Why do you not tell me. Do you know him? Have you seen him? But I know it is not true. He — everybody is dead. Everybody."

She sank back to her seat panting and sobbing, her face hidden in her folded arms. Doctor Grafton had started forward alarmed. But he halted, listening to a footstep that came hurrying down the corridor.

He laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and drew him silently along the walk.

"Miss Lepeyre," he said with a great affectation of ceremony, "allow me to present my friend, Mr. Richard Strong."

"Noel!" cried Richard, bending tenderly over her and touching her bowed head with a timid, entreating hand.

He was as colorless and wraith-like as herself. They might have been, in

their pale ethereal beauty, two disembodied spirits, meeting, after their release from earthly life, in some divinely sheltered bower of Paradise !

But as she looked up, a vivid blush dyed her cheeks ; a radiant smile parted her lips.

“ *O Richard, ô mon roi !* ” murmured the old doctor, stealing a glance at them and turning away. “ She is beautiful, Claude’s daughter,” he added, looking up at Claude’s Way. “ She is like Margot.”

Like Margot ! Like Youth ! Like Love !



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...and the fact that the *Journal* is not a journal of the American Psychological Association, but of the American Psychological Society, which is a much smaller organization.

